

GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS

Mercedes Mangrané / Drainage systems

Intro

The imagination projects intimate images onto the outside world.

The power of imagination isn't so much for creating, but distorting images that are – as Bachelard said – provided by perception. An attempt at freeing us of the first images, at changing the images. Therein also lies the symbolic faculty, and my question on the possibility of changing the statism that seems to settle on symbols.

It was by chance – or by serendipity – that the following happened to me: I found myself staring at a series of little holes I found in the retaining walls on my way through the city. They're the drainage systems that drain rainwater.

Little by little I went looking for them without knowing very well why, as if it were an everyday mystique, and whenever I found something, in spite of being the same was different. Using them as a starting point, I noticed my growing interest in the ambiguity of what is not defined and in the potential for deploying an open and unpredictable framework where the apparent randomness and stability of the walls are to be found. Interestingly, those small inconsistencies that seem to break them actually help keep them stable.

As if it were a dream, far from causal logic and from the pedestrian experience in the city, I was able to develop the idea proposed for the exhibition. A set of paintings, drawings and photographs that were brought together, and that live together under a certain air of collection in process – not under reasoning of property – from a collection that refers to the desire to understand the world and generate other realities through both parallel associations and differences. In these small cracks I can see an enigma, a space for the possibility – of overflowing, flowing, draining – and many phenomena that these typologies entail: humidity – generation of life – the traces and halos that testify to the passage of time.

Through these works I would like to reflect on the subject as a body, as Braidotti would say in her differential ethics: an intensive matter that is exposed to a multitude of external forces, giving it a multiform structure that is always susceptible to being in the process of transformation, even if such a process is unpredictable.

I would like to understand the exhibition as a sample of reflections that, visually, come from a psyche that bridges the gap between the physical, the symbolic and the biological.

Tremor

Whenever I walk, I look all over the place. Depending on how I feel, I look up, other times down. But lately I find myself looking to both sides, visually walking through the walls in search of these openings.

They are like lips, sometimes soft, sometimes dry and cracked. Sometimes deliberately clogged. The erosion of the ceramics in those masonic openings causes a certain irregular tremor in the figure, like the tremolo of a musician's hand on a string instrument, where it vibrates.

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The tremor in objects attracts me. I still look for the reason why. „Because it signifies the chink in subjectivity“ Frederic Montornés once told me, after seeing a work by Lucio Fontana from the 1965 „Concetto Spaziale“ series. The smallformat work showed some ordered perforations on an aluminium sheet which shows variations of squares and triangles, but with an irregular edge, typical of the manufacture, a piece very close to jewellery. We were at an exhibition entitled „From the Earth to the Moon“, at Palazzo Madama in Turin. My fascination by that piece was linked to the tremor.

When I'm in the studio I sometimes try to create that tremor on the surface, the index of a previous movement, as if it were tectonic plates or the earth's crust that were pushing together. I often look for a harmony between control and excess. Like when one trembles, yawns or reaches ecstasy. Shocks that can become, as Derrida said, „metaphors for all the disturbing mutations that force you to change terrain suddenly, that is, unpredictably“.

Pieces

The rough edges of the hand-torn paper present a fragmented unit.

The popping colours are ordered and brought together, overlapping each other, in a series of rhythmic exercises where the figures chase each other.

The rugged pastel, stripped of the movement, from the effectiveness and the stroke. Sketching using the pastel as a material. Cutting up the ethereal and making contact with the page. Forming a frontal plane, with a kind of false perspective, but maintaining the warmth of the caress.

Pleasure as a motor, in a series of cravings that translate mental images and psychic states.

As if they were breadcrumbs on a path, clearings isolated from the foliage or puddles emancipated from the road.

Something like what Lorca mentioned as a poetic fact and „evasions“.

Exorcism

Some works are accompanied by the title of the place where they were taken, making them somewhat more narrative. There are also images that form part of a group and other associations that go beyond the identification of the object per se: ideas about shelter, home and the outdoors; erosion, birth and the gender gap.

There are basic and essential shapes that refer to the origin. As Boris Groys said in his „politics of immortality“, I am interested in what is repeated.

After moving to the new studio in the Horta neighbourhood, my perception has changed: I noticed an older population, which I can observe – as my neighbours do – if I continue not covering the large window facing the street with curtains. This leaves me exposed, but only then am I linked to the direct, unscreened light and to the life of the street. In a way, I am part of the window, of that wall from the calmness of the studio.

In the area there are several walls that contain old green areas, converted into plots, flowerbeds and garden areas. This leads to the creation of drainage systems, many of them ad-hoc and self-constructed.

The premises are located at the bottom of a slope, so many old people – and some children on their

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way back from school – stop to rest on a small ledge at the corner of the facade. I watch them and inside I think: don't go away, stay a little longer.

That ledge is a communicating space. It belongs to those who pass by, to the neighbours, but also works as an extension of the intimacy of the workshop.

The old people are soothed by the ledge of the workshop. The putlog holes lighten the load on the walls.

Aperture

An open and evasive imagination.

An experience of openness when thinking about aberrant and absent images.

In Catalan, the word *tronera* (embrasure) is derived from the openings prepared in the old defensive walls where the cannons used to jut out. It is also called *Barbacana* (Barbican).

Other holes come from empty beam supports, *jàsseres*, in Catalan, a term that may come from the Arabic *jsir* (bridge).

And the name of *machina*, which is scaffolding in Latin, originated from *mechinal* (putlog holes).

It is odd that a hole that lets water flow through a retaining wall refers to another hole that allows it to cover up and serve as a defensive typology, taking the look as a weapon.

Matter accumulates.

I concentrate on the surface almost in a geological way, without even thinking about the word "landscape" – in any case a denial of the landscape.

I leave small fissures, eruptions and openings, through which something similar to mystery can appear. Hidden and covered.

Containment, excess, caution... the overflow as an epiphany.

Flow

I hear water snaking through the pipes of the studio while I paint. These contain the intimacy of the neighbours. Symbiosis is inevitable in the space where I spend most of my day: there is some vomit in them. The layers rise up like scabs, the fluids reverberate.

Being on the ground floor, it causes damp.

The juice of a water that is purified after passing between the stones and the moss, that creeps and twists, as Yourcenar said: that shakes and mirrors.

The tenderness of that which reminds one of their own body.

„Like mother water in glass, there is the indivisibility of the one who feels and the thing that is felt“, said Merleau Ponty in „The eye and the spirit“.

Like a footprint left in a mud puddle, the painting is testimony to the interruption of the apparent stillness. I destroy and pamper, I cover and drain, I let it rest.

To drain is also to ease the exit of a liquid accumulated in a wound or a body cavity. To do this, one

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must practise opening, something that attracts but also repels.

Fountain

The water from the fountains reminds us of our animality.

It is something generous that connects us to nature, despite being in the city.

Carrying and pouring, approaching and satiating, washing up and washing themselves, ancestral gestures.

In ancient Greece and in so many other neighbouring cultures, going to fetch water from the fountain was a scene of female labour traditionally associated with sexual attraction and courtship. But the fountain can also be seen as a symbol of resistance. Considering the historical burden of the division of symbolic space – the outside for men and the inside for women – the fundamental domestic task of fetching water breaks the pattern; it is done outside. Despite the burden, it provided the possibility of socialising, affection and knowledge.

In the Athenian ceramic vases – which we see in so many museums – the iconography in them is a transmitter of the dominant ideological values of the time – 6th to 5th century B.C. – where the imagery of female fertility was reproduced and reinforced. The passions associated with women and the rationality of thinking heads – in the case of women occupied by hydrophoric vases, – given to men, show which gender should dominate the other.

During my childhood, one of the musical genres that flowed almost constantly at home was flamenco. My father has played the flamenco guitar since his youth. One of the moments he enjoyed most was when the tremolo struck up, that watery trembling of four strings. I later learned that it was invented in the 16th century in order to imitate the effects of nature. What's more, my mother truly is passionate about this genre.

The machismo rooted in the old rationality of the songs – deconstructed by so many contemporary flamencologists and singers – is well known, and the idea that „good flamenco hurts“ is still persistent, created in a gypsy melting pot based on a deep sorrow, on a pain resulting from the marginalisation of the gypsy people throughout history. The inclusion of elements from the natural world, including water, is widely known. Sometimes in a peripheral way, other times in a central way, water is established in many songs from a symbolism inherited by the medieval peoples and even going back to the pre-Indo-European period, related to human sexuality and vital power. In times when human beings needed the fertility of the earth for subsistence, the myths and symbols – reflections of the non-human world – appeared around it.

However, in the origins of the creation of symbols around the source converge other voices, like those of the woman's song in the Middle Ages.

As opposed to what happened in the courtly poetry of the 15th and early 16th centuries, where the female voice is almost non-existent, popular love songs with a personal voice represented the woman's voice as much as the man's. There are even a good number of songs in a neutral or indifferent voice that could correspond to either of the two sexes.

Magdalena Altamirano deepens her research on this subject.

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Reverberate

Dolors Bramon tells in her publication „Mam, un berberisme en el llenguatge infantil català“ that there is a relationship between the word „mà“ in Catalan to refer to water. Rescuing the knowledge of the Moorish didas that in medieval times in the Valencian country used the expression vols mà? to ask their children if they were thirsty.

The immaterial heritage that the Moorish didas left over the language of the Valencian mothers survives.

It is easy to imagine that the final m of mam in Catalan can lead to the term mama, to consider it one of the forms of the verb mamar (to suck) and to think of its Latin origin accordingly.

But Bramon argues that there are more Berberisms than seem to have been traditionally recognised because they did not become extinct in Andalusia as early as is commonly believed. The term aman, means water in Berber, and the Mediterranean strip was mainly populated by Almoravid and Almohad Berbers during the Andalusian period. According to Bramon, the Berber mothers who immigrated to a large part of the Hispanic territory could have generalised the term aman as opposed to the Arabic mâ and the Hispanic nicknames that alluded to water, and there the expression mâ was expanded in children's language.

The halos on the walls accompany the return home, drawing anthropomorphic figures as primitive motherhoods.

Breaking water.

Perspiration

The house is sweating. The condensation saturates the windows.

It's the thermal shock between the inside and the outside.

It happens like a kind of short-sightedness that only allows you to see the foreground, biting into pieces of the landscape that is moving away behind the window.

Again, the need to ventilate.

The first move was to de-mist them; then let them slowly clear.

From an apocryphal songbook:

January fog,
close to your home
I lost my way

Being an affective entity implies feeling connected to everything that exists.
To affect and be affected.

Now I see your intention:
to know who you are,
you want to know who I am.

Fiat umbra (2008). Isabel Escude